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NEWS

School Committee ‘supports’ work at Mystic, awaiting more information before final OK

ALISON SWALLOW | STAFF WRITER and NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

February 7, 2024 . 8:08 AM — 3 min read

Town officials have earmarked funds for an upgrade of the heating system at the Mystic School, which currently houses the Recreation Department and other programs. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/PETER CASEY

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Town officials have committed to undertake the replacement of heating system at the Mystic School, which houses the Recreation

Department and Kids Corner childcare program.

The Select Board on Jan. 22 voted to earmark approximately $900,000 from ARPA funds, along with possible grants from either Green Communities or Mass Save Utility Incentive. About $150,000 was voted Jan. 8 for an engineering study.

The study, expected to be completed by May 1, would cover the scope of the work, including replacing the entire heating system and all of the pipes, and likely extensive electrical upgrades. The town won't know the exact construction costs until bids come in, by the end of June

The Mystic School was built in the 1920s, with a major addition in the 1950s that included the current heating system. The pipes, many of which are wrapped in asbestos and often leak, are 100 years old.

Select Board member John Fallon, along with Department of Public Works Facilities Manager Pete Lawson, spoke to the School Committee on Jan. 23 regarding the need to replace the heating system. The committee, which has control of the building, must give its approval before any project can commence.

Although no official vote was taken and the School Committee is awaiting further information about how the project will proceed., School members said they were in support of the project.

During the meeting, Lawson described the current problems with the building, saying there have been "many more leaks than we have had in the past, [often] shutting down areas of the building."

"We're falling off the cliff this year in terms of problems we've already had," he said. "We have a very small staff to take care of all the to

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buildings, and we're spending an awful lot of time and resources to try to maintain and regulate heat in [this] building."

He noted the town has to call in specialized technicians as there aren't many who still work on this type of pneumatic system.

"It's a real resource drain," he said.

Nick Cacciolfi, director of the Recreation Department, added it's not only a problem for the DPW, but his department as well.

"We can figure out a way [to deal with construction in the building] as long as we know what the path is going to be," Cacciolfi said.

He added that ideally the project would take place in the summer, and preferably this summer, as it would be much more of an inconvenience to the programs and the families who depend on them if they had to vacate in the middle of next winter because of a catastrophic heating failure. If that were to happen, he estimated $117,000 to $150,000 in lost revenue not including paying staff, a bigger loss than the Recreation Department experienced during the pandemic.

During the Jan. 8 Select Board meeting, Cacciolfi said there are about 250 kids in the building for the after school program and about 60 in the preschool program, all of whom are from Winchester. Plus, he said, the building gets plenty of use from programs in the gym.

"The problem is that if the heating goes, it would be catastrophic," Cacciolfi said. "We would have nowhere to bring them."

And right now, the staff and kids experience different temperatures throughout the building. In the outer rooms, temperatures are in

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and supplemental heat might have to be brought in. In some rooms, temperatures are 75 or even 80 degrees.

"It's like a sauna," Cacciolfi said. "We've had to move the preschool kids to other rooms."

Making the numbers work

During the discussion, School Committee member Michelle Bergstrom asked what would happen if the project cost came in higher than what identified funding sources could cover and couldn't happen this summer.

Lawson said he "can't say exactly," but he's "working on some temporary measures where problems occur, but there's no thought about what shoe is going to drop next in the building."

Chris Nixon noted that he is "really pleased that Select Board voted to use ARPA funds for this project", but "if it has to be this summer, then there's some lease work we have to do" in case the town has to ask Kids Corner to vacate during construction.

Seamus Brady said he supported the town working to get the project done as soon as possible and Chair Tom Hopcroft said he is "very happy we're continuing to electrify and move away from fossil fuels" by choosing an electric heat pump system as a replacement.

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Celebrate Women’s History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women’s History Month and International Women’s Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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